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CLASSICS IN THE INNER CITY SCHOOL--EXPERIMENTS AND PROPOSALS.

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DOES LATIN HAVE A PLACE IN LARGE-CITY SECONDARY SCHOOLS HAVING A HIGH PROPORTION OF CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED PUPILS. EXPERIMENTAL TEACHING OF NEGRO DISADVANTAGED PUPILS FINDS THE ANSWER TO BE YES, AND GIVES RISE TO PROPOSALS FOR STARTING AND IMPROVING SUCH COURSES. THE FIRST AIRLIE HOUSE CONFERENCE ON TEACHING THE CLASSICS PROVIDED PRINCIPLES FOR AN EXPLORATORY LATIN COURSE TAUGHT BY THE AUTHOR AS PART OF A PUBLIC SCHOOL ANTI-POVERTY SUMMER PROJECT IN WASHINGTON, D.C. IN 1965. THE COURSE WAS DESIGNED TO FIT THE APTITUDES, INTERESTS, AND IDEALS OF INNER CITY STUDENTS. STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS, AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS, AND CULTURAL HISTORY FOCUSED ON A GENUINE AND RELEVANT LEARNING EXPERIENCE. TWO LATIN COURSES FOR NEGRO VERBALLY POOR STUDENTS IN DETROIT PUBLIC SCHOOLS DEMONSTRATED THE VIABILITY OF SUCH PROGRAMS IN A REGULAR SCHOOL SETTING. ENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE TO TEACHING THEY COULD ASSIMILATE HELPED THE STUDENT'S PROGRESS IN LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY. THE CLASSICAL PROFESSION SHOULD COOPERATE IN ESTABLISHING SUCH COURSES. THERE SHOULD BE RESEARCH ON THE APPLICATION OF DESCRIPTIVE LINGUISTICS TO A COMBINED TEACHING OF LATIN AND ENGLISH TO INCREASE THE LANGUAGE COMPETENCE OF THE VERBALLY DISADVANTAGED. (AUTHOR)

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CLASSICS IN THE INNER CITY SCHOOL: EXPERIMENTS AND PROPOSALS*

The shrinking enrollment in secondary school Latin documented in the May 1966 *CW*[1] might suggest that the ancient discipline is out of place in today's public schools. Especially for schools now gearing up for a war on poverty and ignorance among the dominantly Negro poor of large cities, what is the point of Latin? This report offers one answer, based on the experience of teachers who taught Latin in the "inner city," and found it fair.

In June of 1965 the Washington, D.C. public school system embarked on an ambitious project, to be sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity. Titled "The Summer Enrichment and Improvement Program," the project offered to inner city children a variety of summer classes in large blocks of work. Though regular school credit was not to be given, these were not remedial courses. Rather, the teachers were to be invited "to teach as they had always wanted to," unencumbered by such dull requirements as tests, grades, prescribed syllabus and the like.

Ten days before the program was to open I was asked to teach an advanced Latin course in

*This essay is based on a talk given at the April 23, 1966 meeting of the Classical Association of the Atlantic States in Buffalo, N.Y. The writer wishes to express gratitude to many correspondents whose data and opinion have enriched the presentation.

1. Cf. S. A. Goldberg, "High School Enrollments in Latin, 1964-65," *CW* 59 (1965-66) 298-300.

it, to run four periods a day, five days a week for six weeks. For a variety of reasons I accepted the offer with pleasure.

I went down, then, one day in June, to Benjamin Cardozo High School. Geographically at least the program was in the inner city. The local police precinct leads the city in the rate of crime. The program was open to all Washington junior and senior high school students. But, as a poverty project, it looked to bring in especially the poor and the underprivileged of downtown Washington. Previous publicity for the summer enrichment program had been minimal. In the last days of the regular school year the funding of the program by the Office of Economic Opportunity was still in doubt, and indeed final arrangements were not made till four weeks of class in the project had passed.

Because of these uncertainties nobody knew how many children would appear on the first day. Seven hundred appeared. That first day was a day of chaos, "up the down staircase" and beyond. But eventually the 700 scholars were distributed among some 30 courses, including machine short-hand, typing, creative clothing, art, and language classes in Russian, German, French, Spanish, and — Latin.

On the second day of the program I met the students. It turned out that only three had registered for advanced Latin. But no teacher had been secured for the elementary exploratory course. Advanced Latin was therefore dropped, and I became the elementary teacher. We started with sixteen students. Others joined later, and some left. Thirteen students, all Negroes, stayed the distance. We worked together for four periods each morning over a total of 25 teaching days.

My own school is too small for "up" and "down" staircases, and I delighted in travelling the wrong way on those at Cardozo. One could see how a computer could save precious teaching time, since the students had to keep repeating information on form upon form. Yet, on the whole, school life in the exploratory program was surprisingly similar to life in my own school. My association with faculty and students was stimulating and cordial.

The "Exploratory Latin" course was an exploration for myself as well as for the students. If I had had no time to prepare for it, I did have some things going for me. In the preceding April I had been privileged to participate in the First Airlie House Conference on teaching the classics. This was an extraordinarily stimulating experience. It was at this conference that I first heard from Dr. Edith Kovach about an experimental class initiated by Mrs. Eula Gayl Cutt at Northwestern High School in Detroit. This "Latin Heritage" course was designed for verbally poor students.

The Airlie House Conference had provided also an excellent analysis of the problem of the relevance of classical studies, and a series of penetrating comments on the art of teaching Latin. On the other hand, I was at the time quite distressed with what I considered the inefficiency of my own classes at the Abbey School. Many of my students were doing sight translation with a howling lack of sense or logic. I had a lurking suspicion that they were performing the way I had taught, or not-taught them, by lesson and by meta-lesson. Was there some other way, some magic to charm the language in? I aimed to find out.

In keeping with the spirit of the summer program, the mood or tone of the work was to be exploratory. We were going on a voyage of discovery. I believe, with Socrates, that you really learn when you are really fascinated, *kekêlêmenos*. It is the love of fascinating beauty that warms the soul and gives it wings, we read in the *Phaedrus*. Secondly, I wanted this voyage to be conducted within a context of relevance. I had to try to establish some real relationship between *these* students and the area of classical study. In the third place, I wanted to use a structural approach, in an attempt to teach the right responses, not the wrong ones.

To set the mood, I did try magic. That is, on the first tape exercise, we repeated a Latin incantation, with the stated purpose, "warm-up exercise to charm Latin into mind and tongue": *"Stulta femina super fontem sedebat; et stultum infantem in sinu tenebat . . . ."*

We started with an inquiring approach the first day. I insisted that no question be left unasked. I became very impressed by what happens if one takes seriously one of the golden recommendations made by Dr. Carolyn Bock at Airlie: *Listen to the student!* We were using the classical pronunciation, whereas my daily dialect is in the Italian. One of the students who had had some Latin in seventh grade became my teacher for classical pronunciation. Every time I would say something like *chibus,* up would come her hand: "Father, Father, it's *'kibus.'*" One of the students had read six plays of Shakespeare in her ninth grade public school class. She kept watch on my inaccurate citations of the bard. We had

then an open give-and-take atmosphere that was really delightful.

As for relevance, I worked up a set of notes called *"Res Gestae."* These were discussed several times a week. What was classical and vitally relevant to these students? Freedom under laws was. Starting with problems of civil rights we moved on to a discussion of the Constitution, thence to the classical education of the founding fathers of our democracy. For an educational ideal with which these students could identify, we made three points about the classical education of these heroes. The study of the classics gave them, first, a sense of the past with critical not idolatrous appreciation of its present relevance; second, the formation of the mind, the power to formulate, to debate, to hammer out such documents as the Constitution; third, prudence, in the best classical sense of the word: these men knew how to get thought into action. Oh that we were their equals!

We made a general approach to Roman history as a major experiment in the relatively brief history of civilization on this earth. Here was an ideal place to bring in cultural relativism, to discuss the true relations of race, language, culture. We had such questions from the students as, "Why did the classical development take place north, not south of the Mediterranean?" Here was a vital relevance of past to present.

To conclude *"Res Gestae"* I copied out the "What a piece of work is man" speech from *Hamlet* together with the text of Cicero which is its probable source. We looked at the Latin and a translation of the latter, and in the same way considered Cicero's definition of law in the *De Republica,* that reads in part:

. . . Est quidem vera lex recta ratio naturae congruens; . . . nec erit alia lex Romae, alia Athenis, alia nunc, alia posthac, sed et omnes gentes et omni tempore una lex sempiterna et immutabilis continebit.[2]

This is not fun and games, or 'Go home, Catiline.' Whatever one's theory of law, what Cicero says is relevant and pertinent when we are trying to maintain one law and liberty in Selma and in New York.

As for teaching the language by a structural approach, we started with Waldo Sweet's pamphlet, *How Languages Work.* Next we took a brief but complete unit of mature Latin and tried to reach inductive conclusions as to how Latin worked, in contrast with English.

After these preliminaries the language work centered around two poles. The text, *Latin for Americans,* was available in the building. Most of the students could make little sense of the lengthy 'talking-about' the language therein. We used the stories for reading, spending half an hour or more at the beginning of each day for practice in oral reading, pronunciation and phrasing. We completed 27 lessons in the text.

Functional exercises provided a second focus of attention. We used a few tape drills and overhead projector transparencies. Most of the other oral and written exercises were devoted to introducing new forms and structures as variations of a sentence. The basic theme was, "The sentence is a whole in one!" We tried to experience from the very beginning the language as a structure of relations, not as a series of isolated atoms in the memory. I tried to avoid "perfect translation" as much as possible, but occasionally succumbed to the old habit. This exploratory combination of stimulus-response work and part-whole problem solving did, in my judgment, focus on learning the *language,* and proved learnable and testable.

We did some work on the history of English, starting with Rollo the Rover, whose Vikings became the Normans. The Latin origin of English vocabulary remained the most fascinating part for the students. These children knew their weaknesses and had a very impressive respect for words.

What of the students themselves? They were all from public schools, ranging in ability from the finest student you would want to meet to the most timid, least articulate, most withdrawn I had ever met. Reactions to the presentation were various. Three students had had some part-time Latin in seventh grade; several were in the post-FLES French program. All these coped very well with the assignments. After three weeks it became clear that some were not assimilating the work. For these foreign language study was a completely new experience. The permissive atmosphere of the class was also a novelty to them. Here the problem was not to force the student to attain some minimum standard, but to elicit an independent interest, a personal yen to explore.

This second, slower group became the "pioneers." We developed exercises that broke down the contrasts to very small steps and multiplied

2. Rep. 3.33. This text and that (*Leg.* 1.22f., 25) used by Shakespeare for the Hamlet speech are discussed by Edward S. Corwin in *The "Higher Law" Background of American Constitutional Law* (Cornell University Paperbacks, 1965) 10.

the examples. As a further incentive, some of the work was divided into units we called "ladders," of progressive difficulty. A student could opt as many ladders as he wanted to essay for a daily quiz. The theory of this is that if you can set your own pace you will choose something of the proper difficulty for you at the time. To this challenge some pioneers responded with enthusiasm, some were happy to rest on rung one. On the basis of experience in teaching a six-year sequence of Latin, I would hesitate to make a final judgment of potential after six weeks.

Here is a profile of one student, a girl whose English was not the prestige dialect. At the beginning she was hesitant to answer at all, since she was convinced she was probably wrong. Agreement of noun and adjective was a frightening problem. Her learning was complicated by that astounding *first* paradigm in older editions of *LFA, bonus nauta.* This girl had trouble with *bonus cibus:* "the *bonus,* the *cibus*" she would say. A structuralist will appreciate her problem. But this pioneer had spirit and grit. She persevered and became confident in what she knew. She learned.

In a voluntary evaluation of the course this student wrote:

> I think that if a person wants to learn there should always be someone there to teach him. The teachers at Cardozo have taught the students a sense of skill and different methods of studying. And I can honestly say that I have developed a sense of skill and study habits which will help me in my future. I agree with what President Johnson said on an education program: that education is something we have to fight for. But now with school programs as this, education is worth having and fighting for.

For a summary, subjective evaluation of this exploratory course I would say that all the students enjoyed it. All of them learned something. Those who worked did get a *head start* in Latin.

* * *

Would such a course be viable in a regular school program? It is a pleasure to report on two programs carried out in a regular school setting with a good deal more system than the writer was able to manage in his summer extravaganza.

Northwestern High School in Detroit is an inner city school with 99% Negro enrollment. The reading median for incoming 10-B students last September was at the sixth grade level. Mrs. Eula Cutt started her "Latin Heritage" program at Northwestern in September 1964. Some 200 students have been engaged in the program. At present there are two sections in each year of a two-year sequence. Mrs. Cutt asks for the under-achiever, the language drop-out and the student who is afraid to elect a foreign language. In Mrs. Cutt's words:

> The course is set up so that students can succeed if they will make the requisite effort; the work is geared to their backgrounds, interests and abilities. The core is study of the Latin language. The teacher's hope is that in one year students can cover as much Latin as is normally covered in a regular semester of Latin.

Much work is done in mythology, derivation and theme writing. AV materials are used extensively. Students have folders for filing "must" and "bonus" assignments, and they keep notebooks for vocabulary and derivative work.

It is quite interesting that Mrs. Cutt's idea has spread. Under the direction of Dr. Edith Kovach, Mrs. Rose Greenberg has started a similar course at Mumford High School in Detroit. Mrs. Greenberg writes:

> As a teacher of conventional Latin in classes where the students were usually considered 'cream of the crop' caliber, I can say truthfully that I was anything but elated [at the prospect of the new course]. Now, in my second semester, I can only say, if you'll forgive a cliché, that though I came to scorn, I remained to pray.

Starting with a group of 34 students of great verbal poverty, Mrs. Greenberg has developed her own procedure. She gives a cultural introduction stressing mythology and daily life in Ancient Rome. These themes are illustrated by films and slides. The class responded with enthusiasm when it was asked if it wanted to try some formal grammar. After the first semester two students had become so caught up in the work that they were able to transfer to a conventional class. Mrs. Greenberg's structuring of the work so that it can be coped with successfully has brought a sense of pride to the students and a thrill to the teacher.

Would it be wise to encourage such programs in other school systems? My first effort at an answer to this question was to send a questionnaire to a number of foreign language supervisors in big city school systems. The results of this *very* limited survey are as follows: The Foreign Language Supervisor for Los Angeles public schools suggests that in *his* area such courses are not advisable, "as the interest in Latin is practically nonexistent, even in the so-called academic schools." He expects that Latin will disappear from the curriculum of Los Angeles schools in the next ten years. Reports on experimental work were received from Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. Supervisors from

Chicago and the state of Connecticut could report no such similar programs but sent an interested response to the questionnaire. No answer at all was received from public school language supervisors in New Orleans, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Cleveland, New York City and Buffalo. One can prove nothing from silence, but perhaps these silences are significant.

The questionnaire was discussed with others having a special interest in the education of inner city children. On the basis of their suggestions, two points of view can be presented.

The negative view would not encourage Latin for inner city students. Consider the shortage of 'orthodox' teachers, the problem of the quality of teaching, and the threat to the very existence of Latin courses in many schools. Is it sensible to ask that the profession take on in addition the problem of verbal poverty? One Negro university professor expressed the view that only children from economically secure homes with a professional-intellectual atmosphere should study Latin in high school. The school must do for the underprivileged child what is not done for him at home. Some of the classical heritage can be given to all students in history and literature courses. But the language gap should be handled in the English class.

If one considers the immense burdens carried by administrators of large city school systems, this solution, certainly the easiest, might seem the best.

While respecting this point of view I cannot agree with it. On the basis of my summer experience I propose that Latin can and should be maintained in the inner city school. The eagerness and zeal of many of my summer students were manifest. I was deeply moved by the way these students would pursue a problem, clumsily, in inelegant English, but, man, did they want to learn! Though all the statistics be against me, I am convinced that our discipline has something and can give something unique to these children. It would be dangerous to extrapolate from the tiny base of my experience but I have the impression that the encouragement of zealous inner city students like those I knew is extremely important for the future of our country. In our generation these are the comers. Shall they overcome?

Further, I argue that if we are going to take Latin seriously as a part of public education, we shall have to develop an approach for the verbally poor, since that is what an increasing number of our students will be. Other disciplines are re-gearing to present a broader series of opportunities for learning to all types of students.[3] If we maintain our splendid isolation, we may retain the classic splendor, but our classrooms will be empty.

For those who agree with this positive point of view here are some practical proposals:

1. The experience in Detroit provides a model for growth, not through universal master-plans but by the spread of ideas from teacher to teacher. Individuals and school systems that can do something similar with Latin should do so. You too may come to scorn and remain to pray.

2. Development and improvement of such programs will be greatly assisted if those responsible for them will communicate with each other and share experiences, materials and plans.

3. Here I am fortunate to be able to plunder an unpublished article by Mrs. Gerda Seligson of the University of Michigan. Mrs. Seligson's thesis is succinctly stated in the Greek proverb, *ho trôsas iasetai:* 'He who has caused the wound will cause the healing.' She suggests that if verbal poverty makes the learning of Latin difficult, the learning of Latin might be a cure for verbal poverty. A sense of English structure might be taught by a contrastive study of English and Latin. A sense of English word roots can be grounded on their Latin sources. It happens that the University of Michigan is developing a junior high school program which will approach language skills through a unified study of Latin and English on the basis of modern linguistics. This program is not specifically aimed at the verbally poor. I propose then that serious research be undertaken to ascertain whether a contrastive approach to Latin and English instruction specifically shaped for the verbally poor could aid in the solution of this massive national problem, verbal poverty.

4. This proposal concerns a topic that can only be indicated here. Some of my correspondents agreed with me in noting ethnic and social bias toward the white middle-class in text books. Think of ethnocentric judgment in art criticism, and the very naive sociology in most of our elementary and some of our advanced historical material. Think of the "background" of the

3. See *Curriculum Guide for the Social Sciences, Grades 7-8* (Chicago Public Schools, 1965). The chapters on the history of Greece and Rome present series of projects for various levels of ability. The unit approach of this guide with very full documentation of supplementary reading and AV materials makes it a model of organization and presentation that classicists might well imitate.

words chosen for word study. If you are going to teach the verbally and economically poor these problems must be given consideration. (It should be said that some teachers do not find such difficulties in current texts.) I would propose then that serious investigation be made into the question of bias in texts and teaching material, and that steps be taken to remedy it when found.

None of these proposals can become actualities without leadership, a leadership of wide distribution. All are aware of the herculean efforts of Dr. John F. Latimer in this regard. All honor to him for his leadership. But I am thinking of the leaders there must be in a thousand circling camps. Progress in our profession will require the awareness, by all of us, of the problems of all of us. I have no wish to aim the arrows of Arrowsmith at a profession I highly esteem. But it is significant that John W. Gardner in his famous speech, "The Anti-Leadership Vaccine," makes much the same point. The established patterns of any profession become self-perpetuating. Once in the groove, one is less inclined to face the consequences of social change. My suggestion is not to abolish the graduate schools, but that each section of the profession develop a sense of the needs of each of the other parts. Consider these words of Demosthenes:

> You, men of Athens, have the greatest power in the world . . . . But none of these elements of power have you used as you ought, to this very day . . . . It is disgraceful to blind our eyes to the truth, to put off everything that is unpleasant, to refuse to understand that those who conduct war rightly must not follow in the wake of events, but must be beforehand with them . . . . [For] the *kairoi*, the moments of crisis, do not wait upon our slothful evasions.[4]

Latin is fighting for life in our public schools. The country has embarked on a war on poverty. We do have the greatest power in the world. The real difficulty is finding the people to lead in this turbulent, changing, real world. Is the classical profession to follow in the wake of events? Shall we be ever turned to the past, fixed like Lot's wife? Or shall we imitate Aeneas, and commit ourselves to the future?

As I recall my baker's dozen of summer scholars,

> I am moved by fancies that are curled
> Around these images, and cling:
> The notion of some infinitely gentle
> Infinitely suffering thing.[5]

4. *Phil.* 1.40; 38-39; 37.

5. From T. S. Eliot, *Preludes* (*Collected Poems 1909-1935* [New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1936], p. 26).

If the classical profession is to stay in public education, I submit that it must act now to go all the way with all the students.

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CAAS LATIN WORKSHOP AT LEHIGH UNIVERSITY, BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA SUMMER 1966

Literally and figuratively all who attended the 1966 CAAS Latin Workshop at Lehigh University had a truly mountain top experience, for we lived and had our classes in the attractive Kappa Sigma House located 600 feet above the city of Bethlehem. This location caused the classicists at Lehigh to escape the terrific heat of the 1966 summer without the aid of fans or air conditioners at least from July 28 to August 19. Those of us who had studied at the American Academy at Rome had the feeling that we were there again because just as the Academy is located on the Janiculum Hill—the coolest spot in Rome—so was the 1966 CAAS workshop situated in Bethelehem.

In such a setting with a dedicated, well-trained staff, excellent facilities, and a group of fellow classicists, who were eager to learn and willing to share ideas, no one could escape having a mountain top experience of inspiration and of determination to make Latin live today.

This year's group of 22 were distributed as follows: *Connecticut, 1; Delaware, 1; *Michigan, 1; *New Hampshire, 1; New Jersey, 3; New York, 6; *Ohio, 1; Pennsylvania, 8. Four of the members received scholarships from ACL or CAAS and were most grateful for them.

Under the efficient and pleasant direction of Lehigh's Joseph Maurer, Ph.D. each one of us had the opportunity to work in any of these three courses:

1. Archaeology of Italy under Douglas Feaver, Ph.D., Lehigh University; 2. Readings from Vergil and Hesiod under Edna de Angeli, Ph.D., Lehigh University; 3. Methods Course (oral-aural-visual approach) under Professor Harriet Norton, New York State College at Albany.

The three evening sessions, during each week, consisting of films, film strips, slides, and the use of the overhead projector, were always preceded by a community sing of familiar songs in Latin from the ACL publication *Sing Along*—

*=not in CAAS territory.